

Business & Finance

It's a bird, it's a plane, it's Martha Stewart!

By Miche Genest
News Reporter

Was Martha Stewart really here? She came and went with the velocity of a Cuisinart blade on high speed.

Bev Gray of Aroma Borealis got chopped up in the process, but she's not bitter.

"I was just saying to a friend, I never believed it was real," said Gray on August 22, the day Stewart took off for New York City in her private jet.

Gray is a herbalist, who sells health and body-care products from her store on Main Street. Most of her merchandise is entirely Yukon-grown and manufactured.

She grows, harvests, dries and blends the herbs that go into her product lines on her Rat Lake property on the Carcross Road.

It was for this reason Martha Stewart's producers selected Gray for one of five, eight-minute segments to be filmed in the North for Stewart's cable TV show, *Martha Stewart's Living*.

"Initially, they had come here — two or three weeks ago, when they were in town — and they did the lighting check, and they interviewed me on film, and took my catalogue.

"They were very keen, right up until the last time I talked to the producer, they were still very keen."

On camera, Gray was to have made Fireweed Jelly, Dog Pad and Paw Treatment, and Buzz Off Bug Dope.

But the weather interfered. Stewart had two other segments to film.

The first, about making sourdough waffles with Senator Ione Christensen at the Inn On The Lake in Marsh Lake.

Then, she had to fly in to Tin Cup Wilderness Lodge, on Tin Cup Lake in the Ruby Range, to smoke salmon and collect and cook mushrooms with owner Jose Janssen.

And therein was the rub. Intermittent rain meant the plane for Tin Cup had to take off when it could.

And the shoot at Tin Cup took longer, again because of the rain; the crew had to keep shutting the equipment down.

They were so late getting back to Whitehorse that the Aroma Borealis segment had to be axed.

"Martha felt terrible, but it

was because of the weather, it was all because of the weather," said Tourism North's Denny Kobayashi.

Tourism North is a cooperative venture between the Yukon, Alaska, northern BC and Alberta. Its purpose is to promote "rubber tire," or RV, tourism.

Tourism North was instrumental in bringing Stewart up to the Yukon and Alaska.

The shooting schedule was incredibly tight, said Kobayashi.

Stewart arrived late on the night of August 20, and was immediately whisked off to the Inn On The Lake, her headquarters for the duration of the visit.

There, chef Karen Danks was ready for her with a light meal, which she had prepared under interesting conditions.

"Our kitchen at that point had been rigged for lighting," said Danks. "When the lights were on, it was about 120 degrees in there.

"You know, you're trying to let them do their job, but they also tell you that you haven't got a fridge because you've got a camera and a light on a tripod in front of it."

Before Stewart even arrived, it was Danks' job to feed the director, the crew, and all the PR and tourism folks — about 12 people.

But she took it in stride. "We have a tiny little prep kitchen backstage, so to speak, so you do as much as you can back there."

Stewart was greeted at 12 a.m. on the Sunday to a bedtime snack of prawns, bruschetta, cheese trays and shortbread cookies.

Danks continued to produce four-star food all weekend long.

Dinner the next day was barbecued tenderloin with a brandy peppercorn sauce, arc-



file photo

NO FAME...Bev Gray of Aroma Borealis was to be featured on a Martha Stewart segment but bad weather left her out in the cold.

tic char with lemon-caper-dill butter and organic greens from Atlin.

"It was great to be able to serve so much from the Yukon," said Danks.

The only time Danks was nervous was in the evening when it came time to change for dinner. But the nervousness soon passed, she said.

"As soon as they stepped into the building, it was camera, rolling, action — and it was us. It was our time to perform.

"And so you just go into what you know. It's your skill, your professionalism, and I really like that. That takes over, and none of the nervousness is there."

For the sourdough waffle sequence, filmed on August 21, Ione Christensen had already been in touch with Stewart's New York representatives, who told her what to bring and what to prepare.

Stewart's test kitchen had already deemed the recipe a

good one.

For her waffles, Christensen uses a sourdough starter that has been kept alive since her ancestors brought it to the Yukon over the Chilkoot Pass, a bit of romance Stewart's producers could not resist.

"Ione prepped most of it on camera," said Danks. "She was incredible. She's had so many experiences in her life — I'm sure she was nervous, but it didn't show."

Stewart also helped to ease nervousness and ensure everything ran smoothly, Danks continued.

All those who came into contact with Stewart agree — contrary to rumor, she is not a dragon lady.

"She is totally a super person to work for," said Kobayashi.

"She wants to be called Martha. She doesn't want to be called Ms. Stewart or anything like that.

"She's a pretty down-to-

earth lady who just works very, very hard.

"She has about four hours sleep, and then she works from 7 o'clock in the morning until 1 a.m. She works the whole time."

However, she does break for fun on occasion, he said. "She got some shopping in here, and did some shopping in Juneau."

Her purchases in Whitehorse amounted to a tidy sum, he said, not wanting to divulge how much.

"She doesn't like money stuff thrown around in public," he said.

But Kobayashi did have some figures to throw around himself.

"Right now, we have got enough stuff to produce a one-hour show on the Yukon and Southeast Alaska, OK?"

"On that show, at least half of it is going to be on her Yukon adventure. That's 30 minutes.

"Advertising time on Martha Stewart Living Television is probably worth in the vicinity of \$100,000 to \$200,000 US per 30-second spot.

"To buy a one-minute commercial on the Yukon would cost \$200,000. We have 30 minutes. So I would say the exposure's gonna be fabulous for us."

Bev Gray of Aroma Borealis doesn't deny she would have liked some of that exposure.

But she's philosophical about it all.

"Business is business. I feel that just being considered was awesome. They noticed us, I know we have a good product, and a beautiful store.

"But you know, my children are still young, and the Creator works in mysterious ways — maybe we're not ready for that," she said.

And Gray's business is in great shape. She has a brand-new catalogue, the catalogue that sold Stewart's producers on her shop — and she has introduced a new line of goods called Arctic Woman.

Plus, her home-based factory is newly organized and ready to go.

"We cleaned, we painted, we got it ready so that it was like a set. And so I have a clean and neat organized house right now," she laughed.